

Why I am only writing about security metacognition? Crossing the road as a metaphor for interpersonal risk

So why not write about which technology to use and how to deploy them? In short I am lazy. The cryptoparty handbook used to be the gold standard of personal security advice. It wasn't maintained and so it has been replaced by others. I don't want to have to constantly update my advice as technology changes. There are enough sources out there that recommend the tools, who have teams maintaining their texts. I want to offer something that is not out there. I want to tell what a category of tool expects of you. Which also lowers the amount of maintenance I have to do.

The other and more involved reason is by only writing about the ideology and metacognition of security technologies, I take on less interpersonal risk. I will likely only ever know a fraction of my audience. If I were to teach what technologies to use and how to use them, there is an implicit responsibility for anything incorrect in my instruction. In some ways I take responsibility for the uncountable and nameless people using my writing, and that is too much. And when it comes to some security technologies and contexts, these are live fire situations. So what do I mean by interpersonal risk. I like to use the analogy of crossing the road to demonstrate what I am going to be writing about.

If I cross the road by myself, and get hit by a car, I am responsible for managing any injury caused, and any rehab that the incident requires. I, by and large, don't think about this every time I cross the road. The fear that this risk should cause is negated by knowing the rules of how the road works, and having the mechanism of checking before I cross the road. With the mechanism of checking I know that the big clumps of metal moving at speed will hurt if they hit. I intuit how quickly I can walk. Knowing these things I can make a judgement if I will avoid a collision of my squish self and the big clump of metal while crossing the road.

The thing is things have changed since I learned to cross the road. When I learned I only had to care about cars, and occasionally bicycles. Now there are electric bikes and scooters that move faster. The rules around these things are currently a bit fuzzy. I am not sure where they should be, pavement or road, but the intuition remains. Don't get hit by the fast moving thing.

My judgement of when to cross the road are loaded with presumptions that are based upon knowing the rules of the road. I presume that when I step out into the road none of the vehicals around me will accelerate to run me over, or lose control of the car. The only reason I make this presumption are the agreed upon rules of the road that say hitting people is bad. The rules don't stop it from happening, just that there are consequences for doing it. But with the electric bike or scooter the rules are bit fuzzier. In that case if we are unsure of the rules, agreements of liability get messy. And maybe someone should be punished for hitting the accelerator on their electric bike, isn't.

In this case all the risk is personal. I am responsible for the consequences of being hit. I can ask for support and comfort whilst dealing with the injuries, but they are mine to resolve.

But we don't always cross the road by ourselves.

Learning to cross the road

We are not born fully formed understanding the rules of the road, and how to navigate them safely. We have to be taught it. We learn through mirroring those who are teaching us. They demonstrate how we check for danger. They point out what the dangers are. They make the judgement of about their speed in crossing. They hold our hand a couple of times to make sure we get it right. We mirror this until it becomes intuition. (Hopefully) Those that teach us don't stand us at the edge of the pavement and say 'Check for danger before crossing'. How do I check? What am I checking for? How can I judge if the act of crossing will be dangerous? Developing intuition to answer these questions takes time. But more importantly if the child is hit by a car during the hand holding learning process, the child is not blamed for being hit by a car. The person who is responsible for

their education is. The child still has to overcome the trauma and injury themselves, but people offer support, guidance, and comfort to the child during that period.

After a while though the child gains the intuition. After the child's education is complete the tutors liability ends. This series of essays is about helping you develop the intuition of these tools. To give you the questions to ask when handling a security technology.

The visually impaired

The visually impaired sometimes have to trust their helper in aiding them across the road. There is an agreement there that their helper will not walk them into traffic. In this scenario a relationship of trust is developed between the blind person and the helper. The blind person can surrender to the relationship, and not have to worry about crossing the road with less information. If the blind person is trying to double check their helper, then the blind person doesn't trust them. The relationship is less efficient, as it has to deal with two sets of judgments working off of different data and intuition. Crossing the road becomes slower, it may become more dangerous, but overall the relationship falters due to the lack of trust. If the helper walks them into traffic and start laughing evilly, they violated the trust. If they do it by accident they still violated the trust, and there are still repercussions for doing so. Depending on how they handle that accident, they may never be allowed to help their blind person cross the road again. Or if they react really badly, they may never be allowed to help anyone cross the road again.

Sometimes a visually impaired person may ask a random stranger to help them. In this moment they are making a leap of faith, as there is no prior agreement or relationship of trust. If they get hit with the help of the stranger their faith has been abused, but we still say that the stranger is liable. The blind person still has to deal with the trauma and injuries. We still offer them support and comfort in dealing with it.

In all likelihood I am stranger to you. If you get burned using a security technology I showed you how to use, in some ways, that is on me. I don't want that. I cannot shoulder your faith There are plenty of courageous people who take on that burden. Who teach you the rules of the road of security technology. My job is to give you the intuition of how quickly you can walk.